With just four weeks left of the session, lawmakers are set to continue discussions on both COVID-19 response legislation and non-coronavirus-related bills in the 11th week of the current session.

Determining when and how to reopen businesses amid the pandemic is sure to be one of the biggest points of discussion this week and beyond. Sen. Andrew Mathews, R-Princeton, has proposed a plan that would require businesses to submit safety plans to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development for approval to reopen. It comes after protesters gathered outside the Governor's residence in St. Paul last week. Nationally, people have protested 'stay at home' orders in several other states. President Donald Trump has said it'll be up to states on how to reopen amid the pandemic, but proposed a phased approach to slowly get people back to work.

Committees at the state Capitol will continue to work through virtual means.

This will be the seventh week since the COVID-19 pandemic began and became the top priority of lawmakers.
It was another busy week at the state Capitol, with more COVID-19 response legislation passed, additional executive orders signed and insulin affordability legislation now signed into law.

Monday, Gov. Tim Walz extended the state's peacetime emergency for 30 days. That's separate from the 'stay at home' order, which Walz extended last week until May 4. The peacetime emergency, however, allows for some of the orders Walz has issued to continue in an effort to help curb the spread of COVID-19.

Tuesday, Minnesota lawmakers passed the Alec Smith Insulin Affordability Act, named after 26-year-old Minnesotan Alec Smith who died in 2017 because he couldn't afford his insulin and rationed it. Lawmakers had announced that they'd reached an agreement on the legislation last week, but formally passed it this week, which Walz then signed into law.

Lawmakers then went back to work on another package of COVID-19 response legislation, which the House and Senate passed on Tuesday. The legislation mostly focuses on providing flexibility in a variety of government services. Walz signed that fourth coronavirus response package passed by the Legislature into law on Wednesday.

The state also received some good news Wednesday as its first round of federal funding from the CARES Act arrived, totaling more than $1 billion. The second half of the money Minnesota is slated to receive from the fund is scheduled to arrive next week.

Thursday, Walz announced the state will partner with five other Midwest states and Kentucky to coordinate reopening the region's economy. However, few details about what the partnership actually means for the state were released.

Walz then signed two more executive orders. One extends exemptions for vehicles and drivers providing assistance for COVID-19 emergency relief efforts for 30 days; The other expands outdoor recreation opportunities for Minnesotans during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing for activities like golfing, hiking, fishing, hunting and boating.

The biggest news for bars and restaurants in the state came late Thursday and Friday when lawmakers passed legislation allowing takeout beer and wine sales. Walz signed that into law Friday, and it took effect at 12:01 a.m. Saturday.

Despite some of the news this week and a few 'stay at home' restrictions being lifted, protesters swarmed the area outside the Governor's residence on Thursday and Friday demanding the state be fully reopened. Walz has said multiple times he'll continue to look for areas to slowly reopen but only if it won't risk residents' health and safety, adding that he'll continue to listen to health experts' advice when making those decisions.
It’s now the 10th week of the legislative session, which has been dominated by the sudden COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are also just four more weeks left in the current session after this week with the session set to end no later than May 18. Of course, a special session is possible but lawmakers will also have to be doing more work on non-COVID-19-related bills in the coming weeks. Some of that will start this week.

That being said, COVID-19 remains the focus of everyone and as the situation continues to develop, more coronavirus response legislation could be pushed through if necessary.

Lawmakers return from their holiday break, which started Wednesday evening, at noon Monday.

Committees have been working through virtual means, mainly through online video calls, and will continue to do so this week. Most, if not all, of those meetings are livestreamed on various sources, including Facebook, for those interested in watching.

Lawmakers are also expected to take up another COVID-19 response bill Tuesday that covers several virus-related measures, including providing medical assistance for COVID-19 testing and treatment for the uninsured, allowing the use of federal transportation funds for protective gear for transit workers and providing more flexibility in applying for licenses.

Legislators will likely take up an insulin affordability bill this week, too, after leaders announced an agreement on the bill last week.
It was another busy week at the state Capitol as with several pieces of big news throughout the week despite the fact lawmakers went on a holiday break for Easter and Passover at 5 p.m. Wednesday.

It began with Gov. Tim Walz’s State of the State address Sunday night, but a lot of action happened during the week.

Minnesota House and Senate leaders announced an agreement on a workers' compensation bill for front line workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the House and Senate passed the bill Tuesday afternoon, which Walz then signed. It went into effect immediately.

On Wednesday, House and Senate leaders then made another big announcement when they said an agreement on an insulin affordability bill had been reached. The bill had been lawmakers' main focus before the coronavirus pandemic, but Democrats and Republicans repeatedly went back and forth on key parts of the legislation. Lawmakers said that bill could get passed as soon as Tuesday of next week.

President Donald Trump also approved Minnesota's disaster declaration due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which Walz had requested Sunday. The declaration frees up more federal funding for the state to combat the coronavirus.

The biggest news came when Walz announced he was extending the state's 'stay at home' order to May 4. The move, announced Wednesday, was expected with the original order set to expire Friday. However, Walz eased up some restrictions to allow some people to get back to work. Walz said he and state leaders are continuing to look for ways to allow more workers back on the job without risking anyone’s health, but some Republicans criticized the extension of the order and said restrictions weren't eased enough. That debate is sure to continue for the foreseeable future, but Walz already said his top priority will always be Minnesotans' safety.

The governor also signed three executive orders this week. Executive Order 20-31 exempts septic tank trucks from seasonal load restrictions on Minnesota roads. Executive Order 20-32 allows the Minnesota Department of Health to suspend certain bed moratoriums to allow for added beds for surge capacity. Executive Order 20-34 is regarding information sharing in an effort to help protect first responders in Minnesota.

Several House and Senate committees, including the Senate COVID-19 Response Working Group, continued to meet through virtual means, mainly through online video chats. The Legislative Audit Commission Evaluation Subcommittee also had a meeting this week. The main focus of legislation remains COVID-19-related responses.

Time in the session is quickly winding down for lawmakers to address other topics of legislation with the end of the session set for no later than May 18, just over five weeks away. Of course, a special session is possible.

Friday, the Minnesota Department of Management and Budget noted revenues began to start falling, showing the very beginning of the deteriorating economic conditions due to the pandemic. State leaders have already said they expect almost all of what was a $1.581 billion budget surplus projection to be gone due to the response and lost revenue regarding the coronavirus pandemic. As the months go by, that will become much clearer as the department continues to post its monthly reviews.
Lawmakers will return to business from their break at noon Monday.
With the Legislature now in its ninth week of the current session and its fifth consecutive focusing heavily on COVID-19 response, lawmakers are now adjusting to working remotely by holding committee meetings as video calls.

After Gov. Tim Walz urged Minnesotans to keep fighting COVID-19 during his State of the State address Sunday night, lawmakers are set to do the same at the state Capitol. Over the weekend, Walz also requested a major disaster declaration to authorize federal funding to help the state respond to the pandemic.

The Senate COVID-19 Response Working Group is set to meet again Monday and Tuesday through a video call that will be broadcast live on Facebook.

Several other House committees are also set to start meeting through video calls this week, which are scheduled to also be broadcast live on Facebook.

Lawmakers are also expected to reconvene Tuesday to pass workers’ compensation legislation for first responders during the pandemic.

Due to the Easter and Passover holidays, the Legislature will then be in recess beginning at 5 p.m. Wednesday through noon Monday.

Also this week, Walz will have to decide whether or not to extend the state’s stay at home order, which is set to expire Friday. The governor and state health officials talked last week about evidence showing the spread of COVID-19 has slowed in the state since the order went into effect, but Walz has said he’d wait to continue seeing the latest data before making a decision on extending the order.
The Legislature continued discussions this week primarily related to responding to COVID-19 in the state. With lawmakers not meeting at the Capitol unless absolutely necessary for critical work, many lawmakers have begun hosting virtual meetings.

However, the House had its first-ever official remote committee meeting this week when the Rules and Legislative Administration Committee met Wednesday. The meeting lasted about 25 minutes, during which the committee adopted two policies regarding emergency telecommuting and emergency sick leave during widespread illness.

The newly formed Senate COVID-19 Response Working Group then met Thursday and Friday via Zoom, an online video group chat service. The panel consists of six Republican members, led by Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka, and five Democrats. The group is set to meet again Monday to continue discussions about responding to COVID-19 in Minnesota.

Gov. Tim Walz again used executive authority this week to continue responding to the pandemic. Walz signed two executive orders Tuesday, one extending licenses for first responders and deferring education requirements so they can continue work and another to continue the state's medical cannabis program during the pandemic. Friday night, Walz signed a third order to help Minnesota's agriculture industry and truckers by lifting hours of service requirements for truck drivers transporting feed and fertilizer.

Walz also announced plans to deliver his State of the State address Sunday at 7 p.m. through a live online video. The address was originally scheduled to be delivered in March but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

That's this week's legislative review.
Lawmakers at the state Capitol will continue work to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in what will be the eighth week of the legislative session this week.

It will be the fourth straight week the coronavirus pandemic has been the main focus for lawmakers.

The Legislature will continue to work by “alternative means,” staying away from the chambers if possible, although returning if necessary as we saw last week when lawmakers returned to pass a $330 million COVID-19 response bill.

The bulk of the response work done by the Legislature continues to come together very quickly, making it difficult to predict exactly what lawmakers will be working on this week. However, the focus continues to be addressing different needs created by the coronavirus pandemic. Political leaders of both chambers and parties have been working together throughout the process and working with Gov. Tim Walz to best chart their next steps and determine what still needs to be addressed as the situation evolves.
The Legislature continued in its new normal state this past week with legislation to fight the COVID-19 pandemic being the sole focus of lawmakers.

Gov. Tim Walz took more executive measures to combat the virus outbreak while the Legislature also passed a big response bill.

On Thursday, the House and Senate passed a $330 million piece of legislation that contained several bills addressing the state’s response to COVID-19. Of that total, $200 million will be moving money from the state’s general fund to a newly created COVID-19 response fund, which Gov. Walz will have broad discretion in deciding how to use to fight the virus in Minnesota. Walz is expected to sign the bill Monday morning.

The governor also used executive power to address support and flexibility for workers in several industries in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Of course, the biggest move this week was when Walz issued a “stay at home” order, directing all non-essential personnel to stay home. The order went into effect at 11:59 p.m. Friday and lasts for two weeks (through April 10).

On top of that order, Walz also extended the closure of in-person schooling in the state to May 4 and the in-person closure of businesses like restaurants, bars, etc. until May 1. Of course, takeout and delivery is still allowed, just not dine-in options.

There was also big news at the federal level this week as lawmakers passed a $2.2 trillion bill, which was signed by President Donald Trump on Friday, aimed at providing some economic relief to those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. That will include sending checks to most Americans, which is slated to be about $1,200 per person and $500 per child.

Legislation in response to COVID-19 is sure to stay the main focus of lawmakers both at the state and federal levels for the foreseeable future.

That’s this week’s legislative review.
The seventh week of the current Legislative session will be the third consecutive week heavily focused on COVID-19.

After the Legislature began working by “alternative means” last week, all previously scheduled business was canceled as lawmakers focused on bills to respond to the outbreak.

Lawmakers also said their focus for the remainder of the session — at least for the foreseeable future — will be on bills that are:

- Related to COVID-19,
- Mission critical to the session (bonding bills)
- Agreed upon by both chambers and parties

However, as the pandemic continues to evolve, so too will lawmakers’ response. That means the Legislature may spend a good amount of time on a bill related to COVID-19 that may not have even been introduced yet but will be this week due to the evolving situation.

In short, expect a heavy amount of the work and focus to continue to be COVID-19 related as the Legislature, like the rest of us, continue to adjust to the rapidly changing situation.
Work to fight the COVID-19 pandemic was again the top priority in Minnesota and the country as a whole. The Legislature announced Sunday night that it'd work until further notice by "alternative means" due to the virus pandemic, but plenty still happened. Here's a look back at what happened at the state Capitol in the sixth week of the legislative session.

The Legislature suspended rules to rush through a $200 million bill (SF4334) to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, which Gov. Tim Walz then signed. (House vote)

Walz also signed several executive orders in response to the pandemic this week, including the order that temporarily closed restaurants, bars and "places of public amusement," and three others to provide paid leave for state employees unable to work, exempt vehicles in relief efforts from certain regulations and allowing veterans homes to restrict visitors. Walz also added grocery store workers to the list of emergency personnel. Another executive order signed this week grants businesses a 30-day extension to make sales and use tax payments.

On Friday, Walz signed more executive orders to prohibit price gouging, another to open a 30-day MNsure enrollment period and others regarding DHS's authority.

A bill to place a statewide moratorium on evictions and provide emergency housing assistance due to the pandemic was introduced in the House this week. Like all bills relating to COVID-19 during this outbreak, it could move through the Legislature very quickly if it becomes agreed upon as being necessary to fight the pandemic, although it hasn't gone anywhere thus far.

Walz postponed his State of the State address, which was scheduled for Monday, March 23. The governor said he'll give the address via video at a later time that hasn't yet been announced.

At a press conference this week, Speaker Melissa Hortman said the Republican and Democratic leaders of the House and Senate agreed that the three types of legislation they'll focus on in the coming weeks are COVID-19 bills, bills mission critical to the session like bonding bills and bills that agreed upon by both chambers and parties.
After a wild fifth week amid coronavirus fears, which included state of emergency declarations at both the state and national level, plenty more coronavirus-related work is set to get attention at the state Capitol this week, along with other legislation.

Here are just some of the top things to watch for in the Legislature this week:

- Will Minnesota's peacetime state of emergency be extended? The original executive order lasts just five days before needing an extension, and if COVID-19 concerns continue to heighten and the number of state cases grows, could it expand to include measures such as shutting down places like restaurants? Addressing the virus’ spread is sure to be high on the priority list again this week.
- Several COVID-19-related bills will likely get attention, including HF4326, HF4327, HF3980, HF4414, HF4415 and HF4416.
- Legislative leaders announced Sunday night that they'd work by "alternative means" through April 14 due to COVID-19 concerns.
- The Office of the Legislative Auditor is set to meet to select evaluation topics for further consideration, and two reports regarding DHS oversight of personal care assistance and pesticide regulation are expected to be released this week. However, the meeting to select evaluation topics was canceled and will need to be rescheduled, so it’s unclear if that will take place this week.
- A bill (HF4257) that would amend teacher license renewal requirements to include mental illness training, which was introduced last week and advanced through one committee, could get more attention in committee this week.
- A bill (HF3369) that would promote pet adoptions and prohibit pet stores from selling dogs and cats from commercial breeders may get discussed further.
- The Prescription Drug Price Transparency Act (HF1246) could get further discussion this week in the House.
- A bill (SF4196) that would allow a mental health identifier, specifically for autism, to be placed on a driver's license or state ID card at the applicant's request could get attention this week. It was introduced last week in the Senate and sent to committee.
- A bill (HF3047) that was introduced last month and would appropriate $250,000 for the design and construction of a Medal of Honor memorial in the Capitol may get discussed in the House.
- A bill (HF4451) to instruct the Office of Higher Education to explore the creation of a scholarship program designed to keep more Minnesota high school students in the state may get more discussion this week. It was introduced in the Senate last month where it awaits action in committee and was introduced in the House just last week.
News regarding the COVID-19 outbreak dominated the news cycle this week, but some important things happened at the state Capitol. Here’s a look back at what happened in the fifth week of the legislative session.

Both the House and Senate (pages 5360-5361) passed a bill (SF3813), which Gov. Tim Walz then signed, to transfer nearly $21 million to the public health response contingency account to battle the COVID-19 outbreak. Any amount over $5 million not used by Feb. 1, 2021 will transfer back to the general fund, and a report regarding federal funds received will also be sent to lawmakers.

Senate Republicans highlighted a slate of gun bills, mostly increasing penalties for crimes involving firearms. SF2101 requires a compliance hearing within 10 days of a protective order being issued to make sure all firearms have been removed. SF2596 would increase the penalty for intentionally giving a gun to a known criminal. SF3865 would require sheriffs to run non-U.S. citizens through immigration checks when they apply for a permit to carry. SF3573 clarifies a drive-by shooting to be firing a gun from a vehicle, regardless of target. SF1458 prohibits city officials from disarming peace officers who are in good standing. SF3574 would require sheriffs to run non-U.S. citizens through immigration checks when they apply for a permit to carry. SF3912 requires the Metropolitan Council to give the Legislature an annual report on transit safety while also funding safety measures like cameras. SF3866 adds being a civilly committed sex offender to the list of reasons a person is ineligible to possess a firearm. SF3144 funds more Violent Crime Enforcement Teams in the state. SF3973 would require Minneapolis and St. Paul to use 10% of local government aid for public safety purposes, specifically to increase the number of police officers.

House legislators also introduced a slate of bills relating to COVID-19 preparedness. HF4326 adds public health emergencies to the possible peacetime emergencies the governor can declare. It passed Health and Human Services Finance Division and was re-referred to Ways and Means, and similar bill HF4327 was approved by Government Operations and re-referred to Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Division. HF3980 would establish a health care response revolving loan account for the health commissioner to utilize to fight an outbreak. HF4414 would allow people to collect unemployment insurance benefits in the event of an outbreak without seeking employment, and would give workers sick leave if the worker is quarantined or their employer shuts down due to the outbreak. HF4415 would compensate hourly school workers for days missed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. HF4416 would require health plans to cover testing, treatment and quarantine costs related to COVID-19 and prohibit cost-sharing, and would automatically be repealed when MDH determines COVID-19 isn’t a public health threat anymore.

A bill (HF3504) aimed at limiting screen time for preschool and Kindergarten students was recalled and sent to Early Childhood Finance and Policy Division. Its Senate companion awaits action in committee.

A bill (SF3571) to create voter ID cards and require photo IDs to register and vote was approved by the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee and re-referred to Finance.. It doesn't yet have a House companion bill.

A bill (HF3228) to establish a prescription drug affordability commission to evaluate drug prices advanced in the House as the Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Division referred it for adoption and re-referred it to Health and Human Services Policy. Its Senate companion awaits action in committee. A related bill (HF4) prohibiting drug manufacturers and distributors from charging "unconscionable" prices for prescription drugs advanced from Ways and Means to State Government Finance Division. Additionally, HF1257, which would require more transparency with prescription drug benefits, was referred for adoption by Ways and Means and re-referred to State
Government Finance Division, and a bill (HF1246) known as the Prescription Drug Price Transparency Act, which would require drug price information to be sent to the state health commissioner was referred for adoption by Ways and Means and re-referred to Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Division.

The House Commerce Committee referred a bill (HF3032) for adoption that would prohibit selling flavored tobacco products. The bill also got a second reading. Its Senate companion remains in committee.

A bill (HF4404) to limit the use of state funds for abortion programs was introduced and referred to committees in the House and Senate.

A bill (HF3100) known as the Alec Smith Emergency Insulin Affordability Act was given a second and third reading the Senate, and passed. The House passed the bill last month. However, the versions of the bill passed by the two chambers have differences that will have to be reconciled before it heads to Gov. Walz for his signature. The bill is named and Alec Smith, who died in 2017 at 26 years old after he rationed his insulin due to high prices. The bill would create an emergency insulin assistance program and limits cost-sharing prices for insulin.

A bill (SF3564) that would appropriate $30 million to the disaster assistance contingency account was given a second and third reading in the Senate and passed. The House passed its version last week. Gov. Walz had requested the money last month to replenish the account after it was drained last year.

A bill (SF3901) to expand the list of documents that can be used to demonstrate residency when applying for a REAL ID and removing background check requirements for licensing staff was referred for adoption by the Senate Finance Committee and given a second reading. Its House companion moved from Transportation Finance and Policy Division to Ways and Means this week, too.

A $500 million early childhood education bill (HF1) was referred for adoption by the House Ways and Means Committee and re-referred to Jobs and Economic Development Finance Division. Its Senate companion awaits action in committee.

Gov. Walz announced his 2020 supplemental budget, in which he proposed banking $1.2 billion of Minnesota's budget surplus because of uncertainties over how the COVID-19 outbreak will affect the economy. The supplemental budget would only add $256 million in new spending.

On Thursday night, the House canceled all business until Monday.

Gov. Walz declared a peacetime state of emergency Friday over COVID-19 concerns. The order lasts for five days but can be extended by state leaders for 30 days before the legislature would have to approve another extension.
It’s now the fifth week of the current legislative session.

A lot happened last week, and there’s plenty more slated to happen this week. Here’s a look at what to watch at the state Capitol this week:

- A bill (HF11) regarding earned sick and safe time may get voted on this week in the House. An accompanying bill (HF5) passed the House last week.
- Legislation to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak is likely to get attention this week.
- A $500 million early childhood education bill (HF1) could get more discussion in committee.
- A bill (HF505) that would create a task force to study and recommend changes to the state flag could get discussed this week. It was introduced last year but made little progress.
- A bill (SF2596) to increase the penalty for giving a prohibited person a gun from a gross misdemeanor to a felony may get discussed in committee this week. It was introduced last year but wasn't acted on.
- A bill (SF3865) that would require sheriffs to run non-U.S. citizens through an immigration check in addition to a background check when applying for a permit to carry could get discussed in committee this week.
- Tobacco legislation could get more attention this week, particularly a bill (HF3032) to prohibit selling flavored tobacco products.
- A bill (HF3003) to require automatic sprinkler systems in all Minnesota high-rises may get discussed in committee this week.
- A bill (HF4) aiming to stop price gouging for essential prescription drugs could get attention again this week. It was introduced last year but stalled.
- A bill (HF4338) that would prohibit businesses from providing customers plastic straws unless they ask for one may get discussed.
- A bill (HF4181) to prioritize buying electric vehicles for state departments rather than gas vehicles could get discussed this week.
- A bill (SF3975) to remove authority from the Sentencing Guidelines Commission relating to probation lengths could once again get attention.
Super Tuesday got a lot of attention, and rightfully so, but there was a lot that happened at the state Capitol this week. Here's a look back at what happened.

A bill (SF3358) that would make it illegal for anyone under 18 to work in a dangerous job at an amusement park was referred for adoption by the Senate Jobs and Economic Growth Finance and Policy Committee and given a second reading. Its House companion bill remains in committee.

A bill (SF1805) that would allow 16 and 17-year-olds to work in lawn mowing jobs was referred for adoption by the Senate Jobs and Economic Growth Finance and Policy Committee and given a second reading. Its House companion was referred from the Labor Committee last year but remains in the Government Operations Committee.

A bill (SF3564) to replenish a state disaster assistance contingency fund with $30 million was approved by both the Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee and the Finance Committee, and was given a second reading. Its House companion was approved by Ways and Means and also given a second reading.

A bill (SF1393) to prevent minors from getting married was referred for adoption by Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy and given a second reading. The House passed its companion bill last year.

A bill (SF2259) that would double the amount of e-learning days a school could have in a school year to 10 was referred for adoption by E-12 Finance and Policy and given a second reading. Its House companion was introduced last year but remains in committee.

A bill (HF3232) to create a pilot program at Winona State University and Minnesota State College Southeast to increase the number of K-12 technical and vocational teachers was referred for adoption by the House Greater Minnesota Jobs and Economic Development Finance Division Committee and referred to House Health and Human Services Finance Division. Its Senate companion bill awaits action in committee.

A $500 million early childhood education bill (HF1) was referred for adoption by Health and Human Services Finance Division and returned to Ways and Means. Its Senate companion awaits action in committee after being introduced last year.

A bill (SF2995) to allow student-athletes to be paid for use of their name, image or likeness was discussed in the Senate Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee and laid over for possible action later in the session. The same thing happened with its House companion this week, too.

The Office of the Legislative Auditor released its Compensatory Education Revenue report. The revenue is intended to help pay the educational costs of students struggling academically, but the report found schools use the revenue for a broad range of programs. However, the auditor’s office couldn’t track the impact of the revenue, and instead offered alternatives to improve oversights and requirements relating to the revenue’s use. You can see the full report here.

A House bill (HF3008) to remove mentions of slavery and involuntary servitude from the Minnesota Constitution was referred for adoption by Corrections Division and re-referred to Ways and Means. Its companion bill in the Senate awaits action in committee.

A bill (SF3496) regarding vehicle emission standards in Minnesota and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's authority, which would also authorize a study looking at the impact of California's
strict emission standards but restrict the MPCA from copying them to impose in Minnesota passed the Transportation Finance and Policy Committee and was re-referred to State Government Finance and Policy and Elections. Its House companion remains in committee.

A bill (HF1328) that would create automatic voter registration for anyone eligible to vote when they apply for a new driver's license, instruction permit or ID card was returned to the Government Operations Committee. Its Senate companion bill awaits action in committee.

A bill (SF3482) to modify what presidential primary voter data can be used for, which would keep the information available only to the chair of the major political party or persons they designate and to the major political party's national committee, was referred for adoption by the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee and given a second reading. Its House companion remains in committee. A House bill (HF3068) that passed last month and which House DFLers have urged Republicans in the Senate to pass seeks to restrict that data to just a single representative of the party's national committee, and would give voters the option to remove themselves from any list provided to the representative of political parties. Senate Republicans pulled that bill from the agenda this week, which angered DFLers.

A bill (HF3980) that would transfer money (unspecified amount at this time) to the public health response contingency account in response to the novel coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) was introduced, given a first reading and referred to Health and Human Services Finance Division.

A Senate bill (SF3813) seeking to transfer nearly $21 million to the public health response contingency account to address the novel coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) was introduced, given a first reading, referred to Finance, referred for adoption and given a second reading. If unused or reimbursed by the federal government, the money would move back to the general fund.

A bill (HF3964) to expand the list of documents that can be used to demonstrate residency when applying for a REAL ID and removing background check requirements for licensing staff was introduced, given a first reading and referred to Transportation Finance and Policy Division. Its Senate companion was also introduced, given a first reading, referred to Transportation Finance and Policy and referred for adoption this week.

On Friday, House education committees had an education symposium on "Bridging the Gap," focusing on eliminating racial disparities. It came just a day after the state education department released high school graduation data for 2019.

A bill (HF3369) that would promote pet adoptions and ban pet stores from selling dogs and cats from commercial breeders was referred for adoption by the Commerce Committee and re-referred to Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Division. Its Senate companion bill awaits action in committee.

A bill (HF2959) to appropriate $50 million to the Rural Finance Authority to help the state's farmers in times of need was passed by the House. The fund had recently ran out of money following a particularly tough year for farmers. Its Senate companion bill was introduced, referred for adoption by two committees and given a second reading last month.

The House passed a bill (HF5) known as the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act, which would provide employees with up to 12 weeks of leave to recover from illness, be with a new baby or care for a loved one while receiving a percentage of regular wages. Funding for the leave would be shared between employers and employees, and employers could opt out of the program if they provide at least equal benefits. An accompanying bill (HF11) regarding earned sick and safe time was also placed on the House calendar for Thursday of next week. The Senate companions to those bills both await action from Senate committees.
Several tobacco bills made progress in the House this week. **HF331**, which would raise the legal age for tobacco in Minnesota to 21 and add charter schools to places where tobacco is prohibited was referred for adoption by Health and Human Services Finance Division and returned to Ways and Means. Its Senate companion also progressed this week as it was referred for adoption by the Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee and re-referred to Finance.

A bill (**HF3032**) that would prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco products was discussed in Health and Human Services Policy, referred for adoption and re-referred to Commerce. Its Senate companion was introduced, given a first reading and referred to Health and Human Services Finance and Policy this week.

A bill (**HF3072**) to make it illegal to smoke in vehicles when people under the age of 18 are present was referred for adoption by Transportation Finance and Policy Division and given a second reading. Its Senate companion awaits action in committee.

A bill (**HF1058**) that would fund and appropriate settlement proceeds to the commissioner of health to be use for tobacco prevention was referred for adoption by Health and Human Services Finance Division and returned to Ways and Means. Its Senate companion bill is still in committee.

The Senate Taxes Committee also laid over a tobacco tax bill (**SF3512**), which would fund research, for possible inclusion in a tax bill later in the session. Its House companion awaits action in committee.
This week will be the fourth week of the current legislative session.

Super Tuesday will get a lot of attention this week with Minnesota participating in the big day, but there are also several well-known bills that could get more attention this week at the state Capitol.

Here are some of the top things to watch at the state Capitol this week:

- The Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement and the Legislative Budget Office Oversight Commission will each meet this week.

- A bill (SF1393) to prevent minors from getting married in Minnesota is set to get discussed in committee this week. The House passed its companion bill last year, and earlier this session advocates and lawmakers urged the Senate to pass the bill.

- A House bill to raise the legal tobacco age to 21 in Minnesota and also add charter schools to those prohibited from allowing tobacco is set to be discussed in committee this week. Its companion bill in the Senate (SF463) was approved by Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee and sent back to Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy last week. That bill is also set to be looked at this week. A couple other tobacco bills that made progress last week could get more attention this week, too.

- A bill (SF2995) to allow student-athletes to be paid for use of their name, image or likeness could get discussed in committee this week. Its House companion is also scheduled to be discussed in committee this week.

- The House Corrections Division is set to discuss a bill (HF3008) to remove mentions of slavery and involuntary servitude from the Minnesota Constitution.

- A bill (SF3813) to appropriate money for public health response for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is set to be introduced. Gov. Tim Walz and lawmakers will also hold a press conference to discuss preparations for the coronavirus.

- The Office of the Legislative Auditor is scheduled to deliver its Compensatory Education Revenue Report to the House Education Finance Division.

- A bill (HF2023) from last year that would repeal the adultery crime in the state may get discussed in committee this week. A Senate companion from last year remains in committee.

- A bill (HF3630) that would require autism awareness training for law enforcement is set to get discussed in committee.
Outside of a 24-hour break to attend caucus events, which started at noon Tuesday, it was a busy week for the Legislature. Here’s a look back at what happened this week at the state Capitol.

The Vehicle Registration Task Force met for the final time and approved its report for the Legislature. The report proposes some changes to vehicle registration in Minnesota to make it more consistent across all types of vehicles. You can view the report and watch the meeting for more information. The Legislature will now use the information from the report to make any changes to bills regarding changes with state vehicle registration policy.

The House Ways and Means Committee heard information regarding a bill (HF150) that would require inflation to be included in biennial budget reports from the Department of Management and Budget. The bill remains in committee and currently doesn't have a companion bill in the Senate.

A bill (HF3633) to move $30 million from the General Fund to the Disaster Assistance Contingency Fund, which was requested last week by Gov. Tim Walz, was introduced at the end of last week in the House and this week in the Senate. Those are both in committees.

Gov. Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan proposed state funding of $250,000 to help enhance farm safety measures.

The Senate Transportation Finance and Policy Committee held a hearing on school bus safety and the dangers of not stopping for school bus stop arms. The bill (SF1050) remains in committee in the Senate, and its companion bill in the House moved from Ways and Means to Transportation Finance and Policy Division.

A bill (HF3072) that would outlaw smoking in a vehicle if a person under 18 years of age is present was approved by the Health and Human Services Policy Committee and sent to the Transportation Finance and Policy Division Committee. Its Senate companion bill remains in committee.

Legislation (SF463) to raise the legal age for tobacco and vaping purchases was approved by Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee and sent back to Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy. Its House companion bill moved through several committees last year and is currently waiting revision.

The Office of the Legislative Auditor released its report on Minnesota’s prison safety and security, highlighting several issues within the Department of Corrections.

A bill (HF3068) that would give voters the ability to opt-out of sharing their party preference in the presidential primary while also restricting the sharing of that data only to a national party representative was passed by the House. Its Senate companion bill remains in committee awaiting further action.

The state’s projected budget surplus climbed above $1.5 billion, state budget officials said Thursday in their latest budget forecast.

A bill (SF3692) proposing changes in Minnesota’s child protection system was introduced in the Senate. It was referred to Human Services Reform Finance and Policy, and doesn’t yet have a companion bill in the house.
A bill (SF3571) to create voter ID cards and require photo IDs to register and vote was introduced in the Senate and referred to the State Government Finance and Policy and Elections Committee. It doesn't yet have a House companion bill.

The DFL-controlled House passed two bills (HF8, HF9) that would expand criminal background checks on guns sales and allow law enforcement to temporarily restrict access to firearms to individuals determined to pose a significant danger, commonly known as a red-flag law (vote for HF8, vote for HF9). The bills’ companions in the Senate both remain in committees but aren’t expected to get approval in the Republican controlled chamber.

The House voted to approve the Alec Smith Insulin Affordability Act (HF485), which would establish an assistance program and a special assistance fund, among other things. Its Senate companion bill remains in committee.

The Office of the Legislative Auditor released a report that found the Minnesota Department of Human Rights hasn't conducted timely investigations into alleged discrimination cases as is required by law. The report found a majority of the cases are taking the department more than a year to investigate.

The House Health and Human Services Policy Committee voted Friday to advance a bill (HF3032) that would prohibit selling flavored tobacco products. Its Senate companion bill remains in committee.

A Minnesota working group on reducing police-involved deadly force encounters released recommendations for officers this week.
This week will be the third week of the current legislative session.

Lawmakers will have a 24-hour break starting at noon on Tuesday to attend precinct caucus events in the state, but there are still several meetings set throughout the coming week that will be important to watch.

Here are some of the top things to watch at the state Capitol this week:

- The Vehicle Registration Task Force will meet Monday morning to simply review and approve the task force's report, but it still offers a look at some issues and possible solutions regarding vehicle registration in Minnesota, which always gets Minnesotans' attention due to frequent MNLARS problems.

- The House Ways and Means Committee will again discuss a bill (HF689) that would modify probation lengths for certain offenses.

- The Senate Committee on Local Government will discuss a bill (SF1416) to make daylight saving time permanent in Minnesota.

- The House Judiciary Committee will again discuss a bill (HF3008) to remove mentions of slavery and involuntary servitude from the Minnesota Constitution.

- The Office of the Legislative Auditor will present its report on prison safety and security to lawmakers.

- A bill (HF1) to invest in early childhood education will get discussed by the Health and Human Services Finance Division.

- The Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Legacy Finance will discuss a bill (SF3496) regarding vehicle emission standards in Minnesota, which would also look at the impact of California's strict emissions standards.

- The Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy will discuss a bill (SF463) to raise the legal age for tobacco and vaping purchases to 21. The House Health and Human Services Policy Committee will discuss its related bills this week as well.

- The Minnesota Department of Revenue will present its 2020 Tax Expenditure Budget Report to the Senate Committee on Taxes.

- The Senate Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs Finance and Policy will see a presentation from the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs on state VA home staffing and the VA Health Care Reserve Fund.

- A bill (HF3030) regulating the default beverage for kid's meals will be discussed in a House Agriculture and Food Finance and Policy Division meeting.

- The House Education Policy Committee will discuss several bills relating to student safety and staff training.
While the legislative session kicked off last week, work at the Capitol really kicked into high gear this week.

On Monday, the House Ways and Means Committee discussed bills HF5 and HF11 and referred both for adoption, sending them back to the General Register to be considered by the House at a later date. HF5 covers employee protection regarding paid leave for pregnancy, bonding and serious medical conditions. HF11 deals with earned sick and safe time for employees. Both bills’ companion bills in the Senate remain in committees.

GOP lawmakers in the House also introduced bills regarding violent crime, which along the way drew a fiery response from Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey.

Tuesday, attention shifted to early childhood education. The $500 million bill, HF1, was discussed in the Early Childhood Finance and Policy Division Committee and also heard public testimony. Its companion bill in the Senate remains in committee.

Bill HF3068, which would give voters the ability to opt-out of sharing their party preference in the presidential primary while also restricting the sharing of that data only to a national party representative, was referred for adoption by the Government Operations Committee and given a second reading. Its Senate companion bill remains in committee.

A bill (HF3009) to restrict how law enforcement can use drones was approved by the House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Division and got a second reading.

Gov. Tim Walz Tuesday also asked lawmakers to approve $30 million to replenish a state disaster fund that was drained by disasters last year.

A Senate bill (SF3275) would require that ballots of citizens who register at the polls on election day be designated as provisional ballots that aren't counted until their eligibility can be verified.

This week, committee deadlines were also set by the House and Senate. The first deadline set was March 20, the second was March 27 and the final deadline is April 3. While the deadlines can be pushed back, they’re meant to set target dates for committee activity and narrow the list of topics that will be dealt with this year.

HF2983 would require sexual assault examination kits to be submitted to the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension within 60 days, and the BCA would have to store the kits for at least 30 months. The bill was discussed in the Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Division. While several lawmakers added their names to the bill, it was laid over for now. It could still possibly be included in an omnibus bill later this year. Its Senate companion remains in committee.

A bill (SF3476) to benefit the Minnesota State system would close a funding gap between what was proposed last year and what was actually enacted. The $54 million bill was referred to Higher Education Finance and Policy in the Senate. Its house companion remains in committee.

HF3228, which would establish a prescription drug affordability commission that could limit how much patients have to pay for certain high-cost drugs, was discussed in committee Wednesday. Both the House and Senate bills remain in committees.
HF3436 was introduced and referred to Energy and Climate Finance and Policy Division Thursday. It would establish nine grant programs to help fight climate change. The $191 million bill would devote money to energy efficiency, electric transportation, solar energy and environmental initiatives.

A bill (HF3369) that would promote pet adoptions and ban pet stores from selling dogs and cats from commercial breeders was introduced and referred to the Commerce Committee this week. Its companion in the Senate was also introduced this week and referred to committee.

Also this week, St. Paul Police Chief Todd Axtell pushed an effort to remove references to slavery and involuntary servitude in the Minnesota Constitution. The House and Senate bills proposing the amendment are in committee.

That's this week's legislative review.